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HOUSEKEEPERS' CHAT

Tuesday, Nov. 8, 1932

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Subject: "How Farm Homemakers Spend Their Time". Information from the Bureau of Home Economics, U.S.D.A.

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The next time someone says to you "The trouble with modern women is that they have too much leisure", you can reply by referring them to an investigation made by specialists at the Bureau of Home Economics. This study proved that so far as the farm woman is concerned, too much leisure is not her trouble. That old saying "Man works from sun to sun, but Woman's work is never done" still holds good, according to the figures obtained from a careful study of the work of some 700 farm women.

To begin with, we want to know how many hours make a reasonable working week for the home-maker. Opinions differ on this, but most people will agree that more than 60 hours a week means overwork. Yet over half of the farm women in this study worked over 60 hours a week. We hear about the eight hour day in industry with Sundays off and perhaps a half day on Saturday, but these easy hours apparently don't apply to the job of home-making on the farm.

The cases studied were not exceptional nor from any particular part of the country where work might be especially hard. 129 of the women who helped in this study by keeping accurate records of their work live in the Middle West, 139 in New York State, and the remaining 432 in three far Western States. On an average their records show 63 hours and 30 minutes of working time for the week. Of course, not all of this time was spent simply in housekeeping and taking care of the children. The woman on the farm often carried a double job. She has to be farmer as well as home-maker, and now and then she takes on a third job, a paid occupation such as school teaching or sewing. It is this double or triple load which accounts for most of the overwork. Homemaking alone is still a full time job for most farm women. According to these 700 records, homemaking required an average of about 52 hours a week, while dairy work, caring for poultry, gardening and other work took about 11 hours in addition each week.

How was this 52 hours of homemaking divided? Well, almost half of it was spent in feeding the family--preparing meals and dishwashing. Cleaning and straightening the house was the next highest item, requiring about 8 hours a week. The other items in the care of the house--looking after fires, lights, water supply, repairing furnishings, and the care of house surroundings added another two hours to the week's work. Over five hours went to laundering, over four hours went to sewing, almost two hours went to mending. So much for the time given to food, house and clothing.

Besides this, over five hours each week were devoted to child care, purchasing, planning, and miscellaneous items. Isn't this a very different picture from

the one usually painted of the modern home-maker whose housekeeping tasks are supposed to take only an hour or two a day and who, so they say, is then free to devote most of her time to looking after her children, shopping, or enjoying her leisure? For the farm woman such a picture has little resemblance to the real situation. Shall we conclude then that our modern ready-made clothing, ready-cooked foods, and better equipment and household conveniences haven't cut down the time required in our grandmothers' day for housekeeping? No, though the working hours of the farm woman are long, no doubt they were much longer 50 years ago. But the homemaker in another generation had much more help from the women and children in her household. Many of the housewives reporting to the Bureau of Home Economics did all of their work themselves. On an average they received no more than an hour a day of help.

But averages don't tell the whole story. Naturally some women even with more help spent more than 60 hours a week on the homemaking job. The circumstances of the individual after all play a large part in deciding how much time she will have to spend on her homemaking job. The people with small families naturally get along with less work. In this survey, the households with only two people, reported that the homemaker spent less than 40 hours a week in the routine tasks of preparing and clearing away meals, cleaning, laundering, and mending. On the other hand, these same tasks required almost 60 hours per week in the households of 7 or more people. The size of the house and the conveniences and equipment available to the homemaker also influenced the number of hours spent on the job -- and sometimes the homemakers and their help put in more hours just because there were plenty of people to do the work.

No doubt many of you have short cuts to reduce the number of work hours. I'd be glad to hear about them. We can share them with other women if you'll send them in.

And meanwhile, tomorrow I'll tell you about planting bulbs for indoor blooms.

